



**Masonboro Island Reserve  
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes  
November 2, 2016, 4 pm  
Habitat Conference Room, UNCW CMS**

**Attendance**

<b><u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u></b>	<b><u>Present</u></b>
NC Audubon, Walker Golder	Yes
Friends of the Reserve (FOR)	No
New Hanover County Sheriff's Office, Sergeant Steve Schmidlin	No
New Hanover County Planning Department, Dylan McDonnell	Yes
NC Coastal Land Trust, Jesica Blake	Yes
Division of Marine Fisheries	No
Division of Parks and Recreation – CB, Chris Helms	No
Town of Wrightsville Beach	No
<b><u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u></b>	
Neal Andrew	Yes
Richard Cecelski	No
Masonboro.org	Yes
Haywood Newkirk	No
William Raney	Yes
Pat Rittenmeyer	No
Sam Romano	No
Dr. Anthony Snider	No
Surfrider, Cape Fear – Ethan Crouch	Yes
Ted Wilgis	Yes
Martin Willard	Yes
Dr. Amanda Williard	Yes
<b><u>Others Present</u></b>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator & Southern Sites Manager	
Heather Wells, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Research Specialist	

## **Reserve-wide Administrative Update**

- *Staffing News*

- Elise Gilchrist joined the Reserve team in August as our Communications and Project Management Specialist. Elise has a Bachelor's degree in Animal Behavior. Shortly after graduating, she moved to Thailand and spent two years working as a research assistant for a non-profit organization that studies Asian elephant cognition and promotes wildlife conservation. It was through this experience that she recognized her passion for science communication. She then held a position at a marine conservation field station in Mexico working as a media and communications specialist.
- Kate (Murray) Jones joined the Reserve in October as our Northern Sites Manager. Kate has a Bachelor's degree in Biology with a minor in Environmental Studies from the College of Charleston and a professional degree in Landscape Architecture from The University of British Columbia. She most recently worked with The Nature Conservancy in natural area management of the Nags Head Woods Preserve and served as the GIS analyst and community engagement coordinator for the NC Coastal Resilience project. Additionally, Kate has landscape design and planning experience in residential and municipal settings and currently serves on the Town of Nags Head's Planning Board.
- The Reserve is hiring a temporary Stewardship and Outreach Specialist for the Southern Sites office. This position will primarily support the stewardship program but will also continue some outreach activities on a limited basis. The position closes on November 4 with an anticipated start date to be determined in the near future.

- *NCNERR Management Plan Update*

Staff are continuing to work on the management plan update for the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve. NOAA is reviewing initial draft chapters of the plan as they are completed to ensure that all required elements are included per the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) management plan guidelines; approximately half of the chapters have been reviewed or are under review currently. The Reserve will then seek input on the full initial draft plan from the LACs, N.C. Coastal Resources Commission (CRC), and the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality. NOAA will then review the final draft management plan for content and compliance with the NERRS management plan guidelines. A 30-day public comment period and three public meetings will be held on the final draft management plan prior to the plan's final publication. Staff are planning to review the full initial draft plan with the LACs at their spring 2017 meetings and share the plan and LAC comments on the plan with the CRC at their April 2017 meeting.

- *Budget*

- The Division of Coastal Management received \$619,322 from NOAA for operation of the NCNERR portion of the Coastal Reserve during this fiscal year, up \$24,872 from last year. The additional funds are being used to cover fixed cost increases and to fund a portion of the temporary staffing positions through the annual budget rather than relying on a variety of different funding sources that vary from year to year.

- The Division of Coastal Management's state appropriations were reduced by \$27,173 this fiscal year as required by the Department of Environmental Quality. As a result, the appropriations allocated for the Reserve program were reduced by approximately \$5,000.
- *Periodic Rules Review*  
 The Coastal Reserve's rules, 07O, are scheduled to be reviewed by the Rules Review Commission in June 2017 as part of the Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process (G.S. 150B-21.3A). Staff classified each rule citation in 07O as necessary with substantive public interest, necessary without substantive public interest, or unnecessary per G.S. 150B-21.3A (c)(1). Staff then revised the initial draft classification based on input from the LACs and the CRC supported the revised initial draft classification at its July 2016 meeting. The Department of Environmental Quality approved revised initial draft classification and the classification is currently out for public comment through November 21, 2016. As of October 21, 2016, the approximate mid-point of the public comment period, no comments had been received. After the public comment period closes, staff will compile a report for submittal to the Rules Review Commission that responds to comments received and amends the initial agency determinations if necessary. The LACs will have the opportunity to review the draft report in January 2017 prior to presentation of the report to the CRC at its February 2017 meeting. Any proposed amendments to the rule language received during the public comment period will be considered during the readoption process.

### **Site Update/Old Business**

- *Fourth of July operation –*  
 For the 2016 holiday, the NCNERR contracted with the NHCSO for 203 hours of security service at a cost of \$6090. A total of 26 officers patrolled the soundside beach on Masonboro Island (First Beach), while additional officers manned several vessels in the area. Agencies involved in the overall efforts included the US Coast Guard, New Hanover County Sheriff's Office, Wrightsville Beach Police and Park Ranger, Wrightsville Beach Ocean Rescue, New Hanover County Fire Dept., Wrightsville Beach Fire Dept., and New Hanover County E.M.S. The NHSCO estimated the crowd on the island to be over 1000 people with close to 200 boats anchored on the island, the associated dredge spoil island and in Masonboro Channel. A unified command post was set up at the Coast Guard station and an on-island command post was set up at a tent at the southern end of First Beach. The New Hanover Regional Medical Center State Medical Assistance Team provided basic first aid at a tent beside the NHCSO tent. Response throughout the day included: 86 calls for assistance, 58 citations issued (underage consumption, underage possession, trespass, possessing spirituous liquor, resist/delay), and 1 arrest (disorderly). The Reserve coordinated with law enforcement and conducted the same pre-holiday activities as in recent years in terms of installation of temporary signage and public relations efforts.

- *Seasonal activities –*

The NCNERR conducted seasonal activities related to diamondback terrapins, sea turtles, and shorebirds. One paid intern and five unpaid interns (including one communications intern), employed three seasonal staff, and almost 100 total community volunteers supported these programs.

The citizen science program, the Terrapin Tally, was conducted in April and May. Fifty-four volunteers participated for a total of 274 hours at a value of \$5,883. Weather, primarily high winds, impacted most of the data collection sessions, although a total of 27 routes was paddled across 4 data collection periods. The average number of terrapins sighted was 0.85 per paddled route, down from 3.51 in 2014. Although many factors are involved with how many terrapins may be seen in an area at a given time, the decrease in sightings, coupled with reports from recreational users seeing terrapins in crab pots, reserve staff's anecdotal decrease in sightings this season, and a documented increase in crab fishing activity in the past two seasons led to our interest in working with DMF to discuss options for protecting this species at this site. No specific plans are underway at this time, but this demonstrates the usefulness of this type of citizen derived monitoring data.

Sea turtle nesting season was successful, with 32 total nests, including 7 green sea turtle nests. 35 volunteers supported this activity for a total of 171 hours. No predation of sea turtle nests (other than the occasional ghost crab) was recorded. Hatch success was in the normal range at 75%. Eight nests were lost due to Hurricane Matthew with the fate of these nests not being known.

The shorebird nesting season was remarkable. The shorebird technician monitored 38 pairs of American oystercatchers through the season. These pairs produced a total of 37 fledged chicks with a resulting fecundity of 0.97 fledglings/pair for the season. This is compared to 0.147 in 2015, 0.152 in 2014, and 0.265 in 2013 and well above the 0.35 believed to be needed for a stable population and the 0.50 desired for population growth. The high rate of success is believed to be a result of predator management efforts undertaken in early 2016. Working with Audubon staff, Reserve staff were also able to band 14 adult oystercatchers early in the season and 21 chicks just before fledging. Other species noted as nesting on the island this season include Wilson's plover (31 pairs) and black skimmer (1 pair). Other nests noted during monitoring were willet (4 nests), black duke (1 nest), clapper rail (1 nest), and common night hawk (3 nests). Nesting enclosures were posted at four common landing areas where birds were known to be nesting and maintained from April 15 – August 30. A small group of volunteers continue to support posting and maintaining these protective structures.

- *Outreach programs –*

There is no longer an educator in the southern sites office, as Marie Davis's time with the Reserve ended in June. However, the fall series of educational talks developed by Marie during the past few years was still conducted. The End of Season Report was cancelled due to Hurricane Matthew. The Incredible Oyster Session, with the tour of the research hatchery, and Blue Crab Basics, with local crabber Sam Romano and UNCW researcher Susan Brander were held on October 13 and 20, respectively and reached 38 participants.

Barrier Island Mammals and Reptiles will be held on November 3. No other outreach programs are planned at this time.

- *Storm report –*

Hurricane Matthew caused scattered impacts at the site. In general, approximately 10-12 feet of the front dune was eroded in most areas. Some stretches of the dune line near the north end were breached, with ocean water sitting in pools in the backdune grasslands. In the mid-south portion of the island, a mile-long stretch of the island has fairly significant overwash fans and very little dune structure remaining. In the upper Johns Creek area, water was still crossing from the ocean into the sound at high tide two weeks after the storm. The south end at the inlet had a significant amount of erosion and overwash. More remnant trees and old marsh edge have appeared along the inlet and ocean front as sand has been shifted. The slope of the beach was altered in some areas. Reserve staff worked with UNCW researchers in the days prior to and following the storm to have elevation data collected along the southern half of the island. Results are not yet available but should provide an interesting perspective on storm induced changes on the site. Moderate amounts of small debris items were washed up along with wrack on both the ocean and sound tide lines, but no large debris (boat or dock sections) has been noted. A brief presentation was given of photos of the site and the conditions described above.

- *Shellfish lease policy –*

There are currently two shellfish leases at the site, both located in Big Bay. In November of 2015, Reserve staff recommended to DMF that no further leases be considered within Reserve boundaries through December 2016. This temporary suspension was enacted to give the Reserve time to consider and evaluate how this activity and siting of leases within the boundaries interacts with the various management designations, programs, rules, and policies that affect the Reserve sites. Concerns the Reserve staff have about this activity include: the unknown ecological impacts of leases, particularly the cumulative impact of multiple leases; how these impacts may jeopardize the Reserve sites' ability to serve as "control" research and monitoring sites; the ability of other traditional users to effectively utilize the sites; and the possible impact to the recreational visitor experience. Reserve staff have since been working to develop an internal policy to describe how shellfish lease requests will be evaluated, to outline how the Reserve will work with DMF to site leases to reduce conflicts with other uses and with ecologically sensitive resources, and to determine what thresholds may be appropriate to ensure that the natural, ambient conditions of the sites are not altered and that the research and long-term monitoring purposes of the Reserve are maintained. Staff anticipate having a final policy completed before the end of the temporary suspension at which time new proposed leases will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Group discussion revealed a variety of opinions and led to suggestions from individual members, including:

- require leases within the Reserve to conduct or fund monitoring activities to understand impacts
- use extreme caution moving forward, given the unknowns – adopt a conservative approach to the total area of leases allowed

- monitor the first two leases for the initial lease period before allowing more
- wait for the results of the Science Collaborative grant to better understand this activity at this site
- look at other states with more advanced aquaculture industries to see what issues they are having and how they have handled siting leases in reserve areas
- obtain funds from the moneys the general assembly allocated toward aquaculture last year to support additional monitoring and research
- do not allow large areas of the site to be covered with oyster bags
- consider how this activity will impact recreational shellfishing and commercial shellfishermen harvesting native shellfish from the site.

The committee asked that the site manager explore whether it would be helpful and appropriate for the committee to provide input on the policy, when completed.

### **New Business**

- None

### **Roundtable Discussion**

- Mr. Andrew stated that receiving minutes of meetings soon after the meeting date would be preferable to receiving them close to the following meeting date.
- Mr. Wilgis shared that the NC Coastal Federation led Science Collaborative project seeking to improve water quality in the Bradley and Hewletts Creek watersheds has produced excellent results and has led to several other funding opportunities that are allowing the partner organizations to continue with that effort.

### **Public Comments**

- None

### **Action Items**

- Reserve staff will explore options for committee members to provide input on the shellfish lease policy.
- Reserve staff will provide the periodic rules review report to committee members in January.
- Reserve staff will provide the draft management plan to committee members following its completion. Members will have two weeks in which to provide written comments.
- Reserve staff will contact committee members in January to establish dates for 2017 meetings.